

# Estuary Blueprint Task 3-5

## Priority Conservation Area Framework Refresh

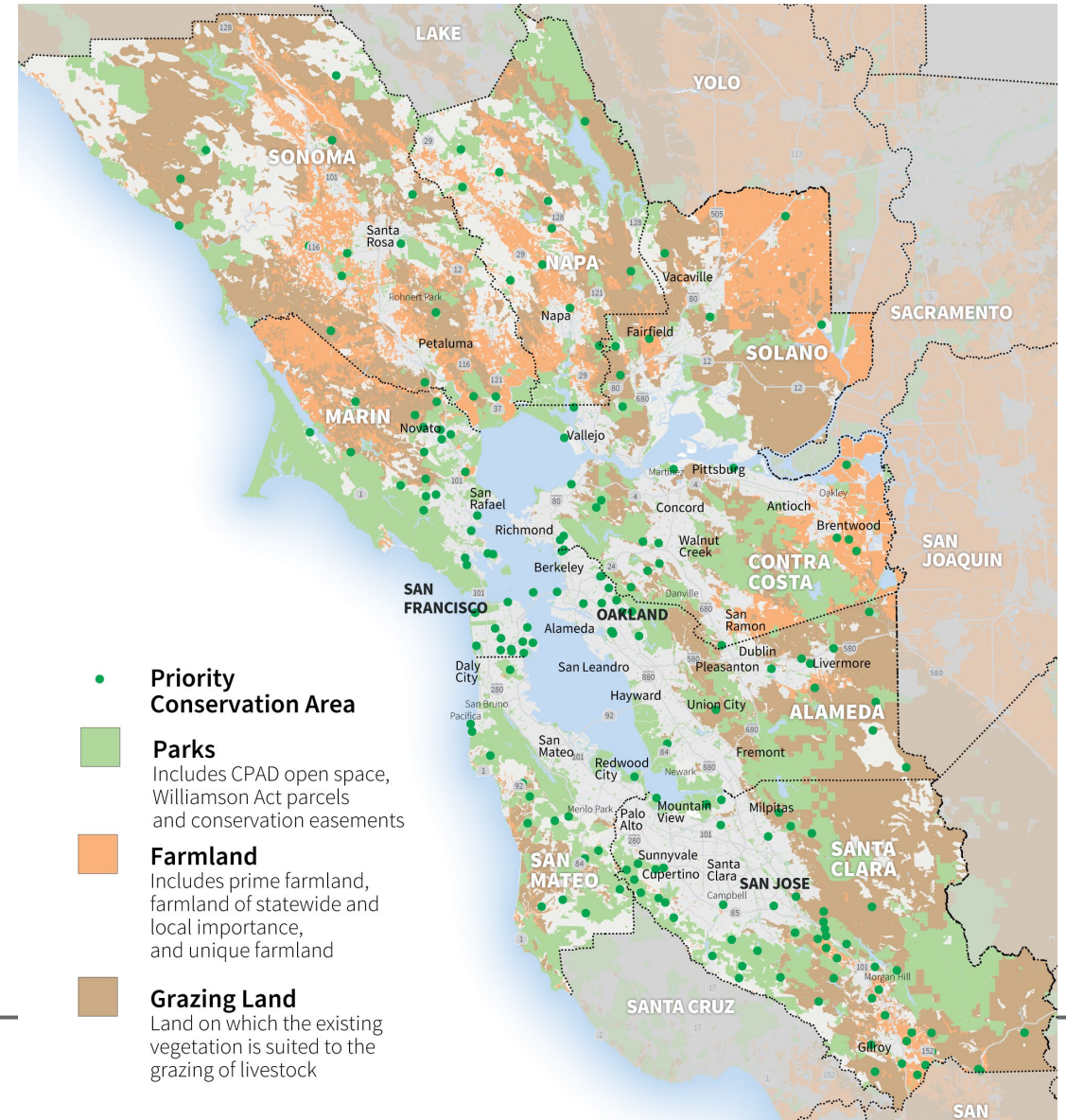


ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS  
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

SFEP Implementation Committee  
May 17, 2023

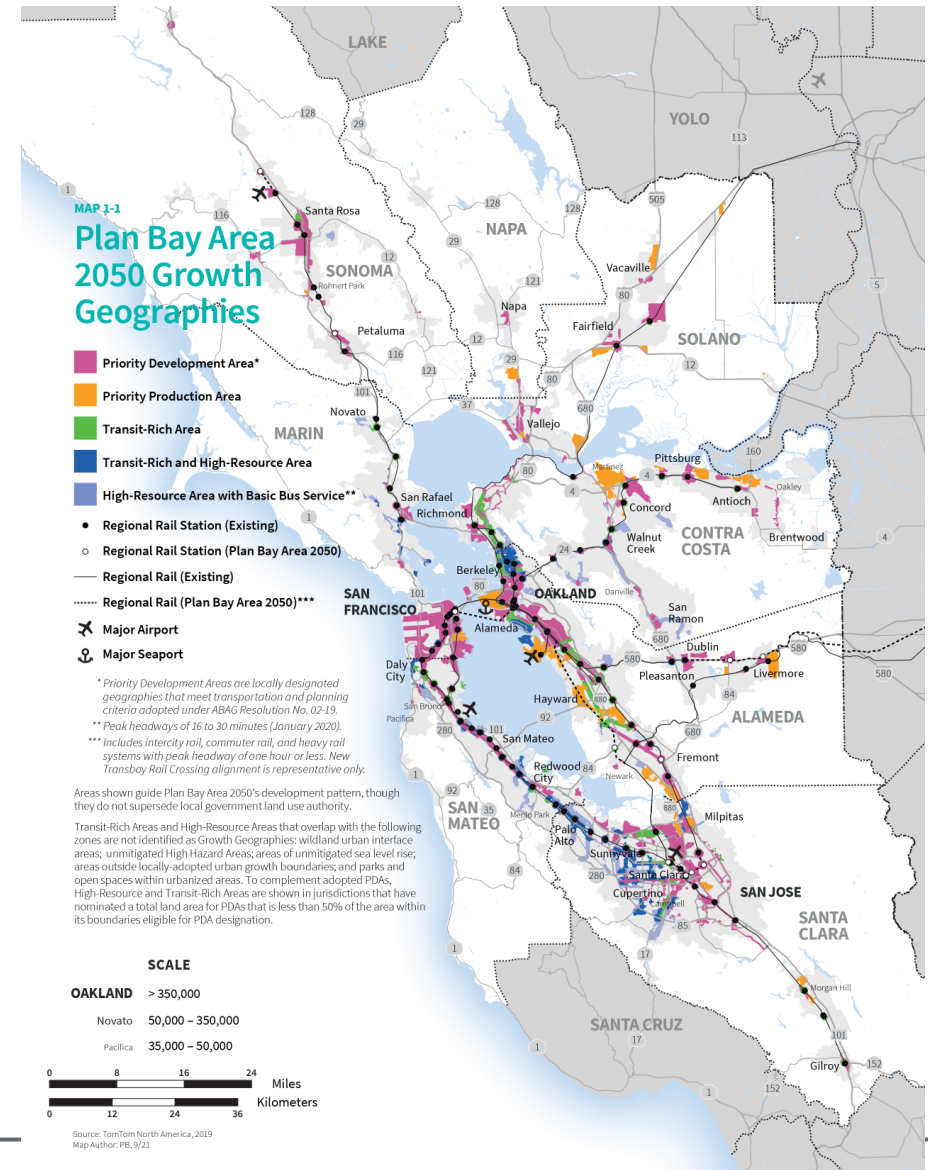
# What is a Priority Conservation Area?

- Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) are locations nominated by cities, counties, and park/open space districts and designated by the Association of Bay Area Governments for natural habitat and resource protection (and more!)
- There are **185 PCAs** within the region, representing approximately 2.3 million acres of land
- Existing PCAs are as small as three acres or as large as 400,000+ acres



# Why ABAG / MTC / SFEP

- PCAs compliment Plan Bay Area's “**focused growth**” framework, where housing and jobs are focused in transit-served Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and open space is protected
- Create a specific and shared concept of where **growth can be accommodated** (priority development areas) and what **areas need protection** (priority conservation areas) in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.



# Program History

- The PCA planning framework was **first designed in 2007**
- Established a process for nominations for regionally designating areas of regional significance that have **broad community support and an urgent need for protection.**
- Priority areas generally contain important agricultural, natural resource, watershed, historical, scenic, cultural, recreational, and/or ecological values and ecosystem functions.



Rolling hills and ocean views  
Image Source: National Park Service



Grazing sheep  
Image Source: Karl Kroeber



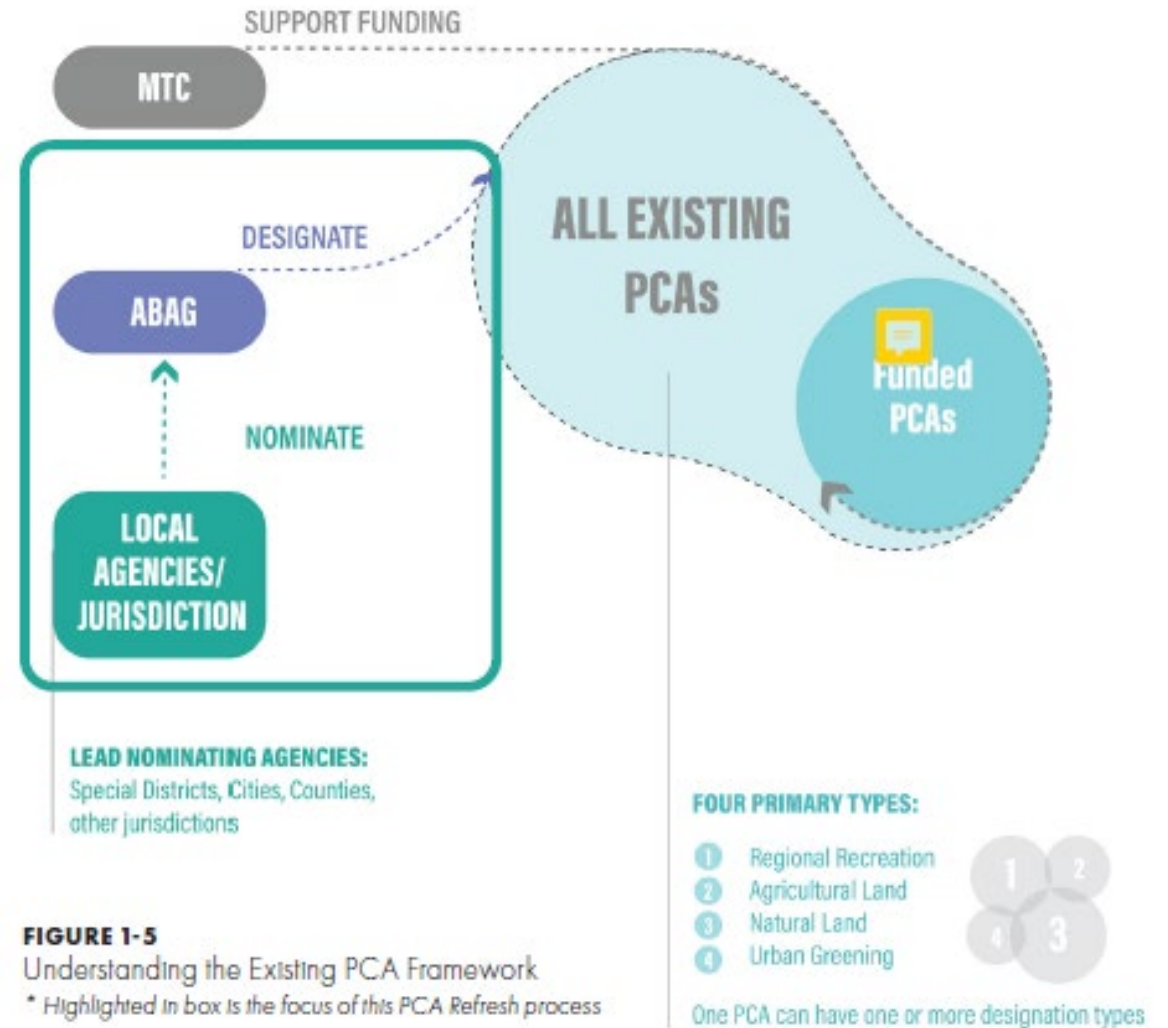
Urban garden  
Image Source: Hayward Public Library



Hiking trail  
Image Source: Ben Botkin

# Prior Program Updates

- PCA framework received a **minor update in 2014** to provide greater specificity about the qualities and function of different types of PCAs
- More detailed guidelines for PCA applications, review, and adoption, including spatial mapping
- Established four primary designation types: **natural landscapes, agricultural lands, urban greening, and regional recreation**



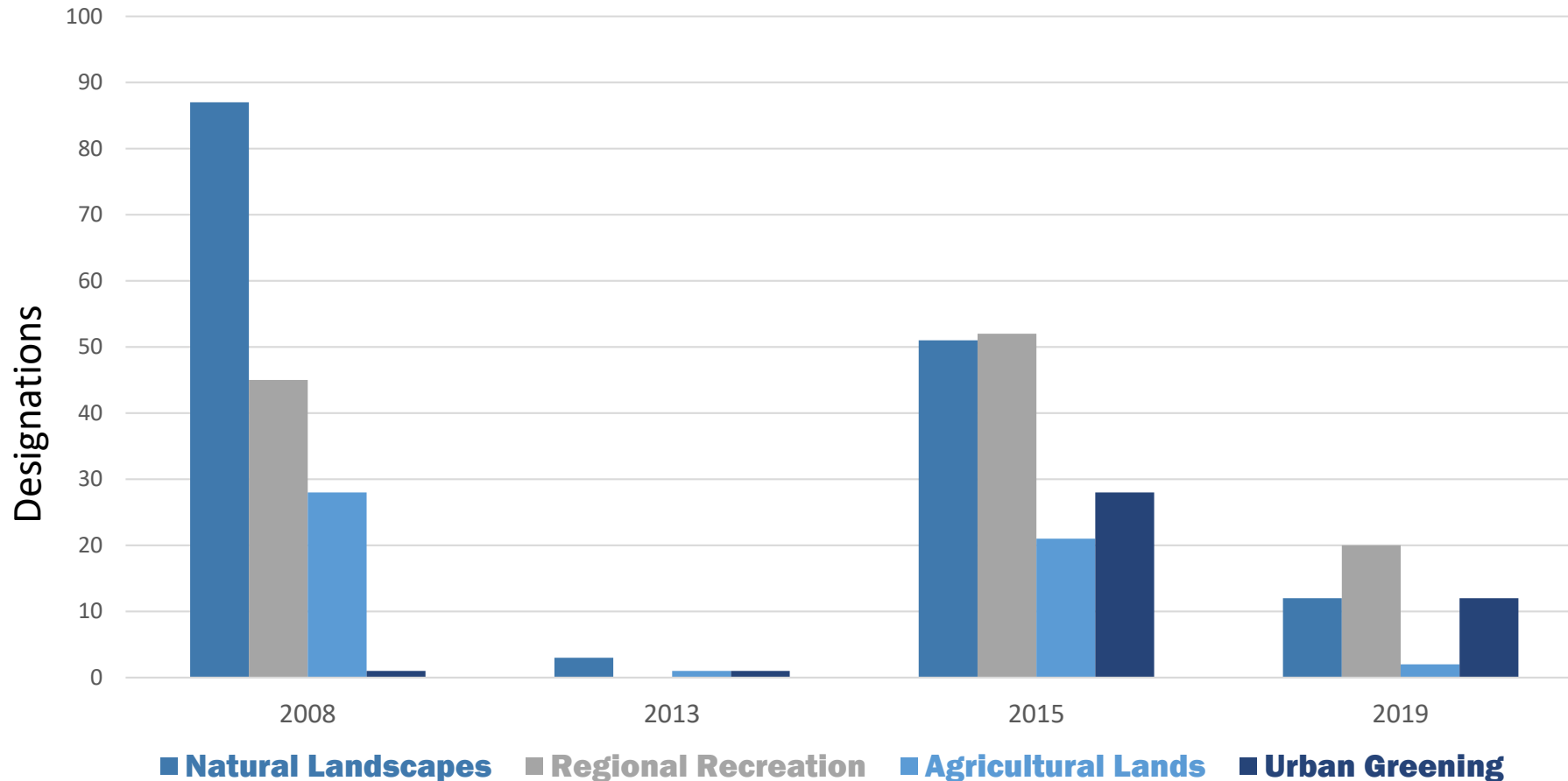
PCA Types	Definition
Natural Landscapes	Areas critical to the functioning of wildlife and plant habitats, aquatic ecosystems, and the region's water supply and quality.
Agricultural / Working Land	Farmland, grazing land and timberland that support the region's agricultural economy and provide additional benefits such as habitat protection and carbon capture.
Regional Recreation	Existing and potential regional parks, trails, and other publicly accessible recreation facilities.
Urban Greening	Existing and potential green spaces in cities that improve community health, capture carbon emissions, address stormwater, and enhance the public realm.
<i>Climate Adaptation*</i>	<i>Currently under development</i>

# PCA Designations

<u>Sub-Region</u>	# of PCAs by Sub-Region	% of Total	County	# of PCAs by County	% of Total
East Bay	42	23%	Alameda	25	14%
			Contra Costa	17	9%
Peninsula	28	15%	San Francisco	12	6%
			San Mateo	16	9%
South Bay	55	30%	Santa Clara	55	30%
North Bay	56	30%	Marin	22	12%
			Napa	9	5%
			Solano	10	5%
			Sonoma	15	8%
Multi-County	4	2%	Multi-County	4	2%
Grand Total	185		Grand Total	185	



# PCA Designations

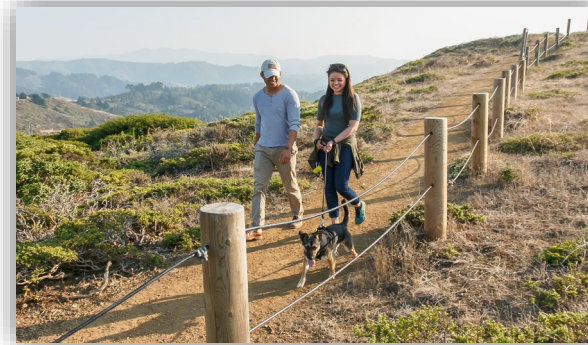


\* Totals do not sum to 185 due to multiple designations

- ❑ 51% of PCAs with a Natural Landscapes designation were created in 2008
- ❑ 42 total PCAs include an **Urban Greening** designation, which was introduced in 2014
- ❑ The composition of PCA designations is changing over time

# PCA Grant Program

- MTC has awarded **\$26 million** in grant funds during One Bay Area Grant (OBAG) Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 programs, in support of **56 total PCA projects**
- Eligible project types have included:
  - Protection of natural resource, open space, or agricultural lands
  - Habitat restoration or enhancements
  - Bicycle and pedestrian access improvements
  - Urban greening
  - Planning activities
- **\$18 million for PCAs has been proposed for OBAG Cycle 3**, with the next call for projects anticipated in 2024 – making this a prime opportunity to **refresh** the framework



Milagra Battery Trail  
Image Source: Vivien Kim Thorp, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy



900 Innes Park Planning  
Image Source: San Francisco Recreation and Parks

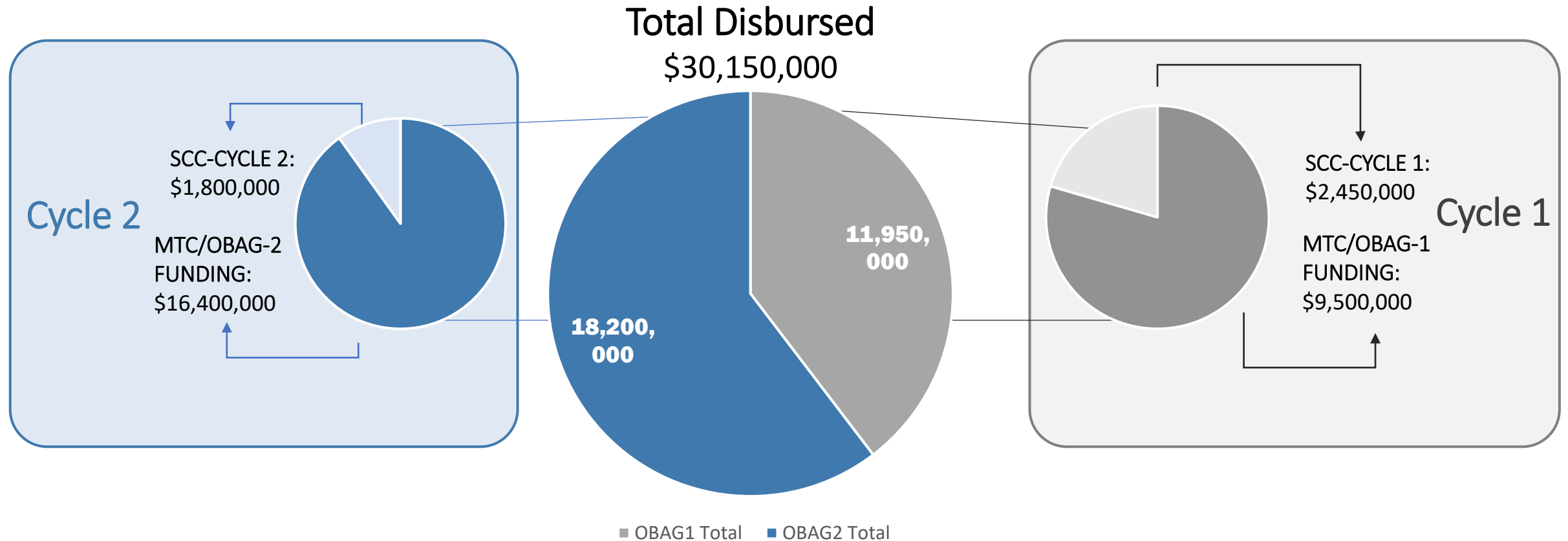


Pinole Shores to Bayfront Park  
Image Source: Karin Betts



Dotson Family Marsh  
Image Source: East Bay Regional Parks District

# Existing PCA Analysis: Funding



## 32 distinct PCAs, or 16% of the total, received PCA grant funding in support of 58 projects

- Primary project types funded include: access and/or trail improvements (72%); planning (12%); acquisition (9%); restoration (3%); rehabilitation (2%); urban greening (2%)

# PCA Grant Program

County	Natural Landscapes	Agricultural Lands	Urban Greening	Regional Recreation	TOTAL
Sonoma	2	0	0	0	2
Marin	5	2	1	2	10
Napa	1	1	0	0	2
San Mateo	4	1	1	2	8
San Francisco	1	0	1	1	3
Santa Clara	3	3	2	3	11
Alameda	1	1	2	2	6
Contra Costa	2	0	0	1	3
Solano	1	1	1	0	3
Total	20	9	8	11	48

# Refreshing the PCA Planning Framework

- **A lot has changed since 2007:** climate change risks, equity considerations, conservation data and science, mapping technologies, state and regional policy goals
- Staff believe the PCA framework can act as a **more effective regional policy tool to advance Plan Bay Area 2050's environment strategies:** expanding access to parks and open space and reducing risks from hazards
- Incorporating additional input from partners and stakeholders, refreshing the PCA framework was **included in the adopted Plan Bay Area 2050 Implementation Plan as Action 10c**



# Estuary Blueprint – Task 3-5



Overcome challenges to accelerate implementation of climate adaptation projects that prioritize natural and nature-based strategies.

Remove barriers that stand in the way of implementing projects that prepare and adapt the Estuary's ecosystems and communities for climate change. Barriers to the implementation of projects that address climate change include lack of technical expertise and data, lack of funding, and regulatory policies and processes.

- **Blueprint Task 3-5** Further integrate resilience and natural resource protection into Plan Bay Area by restructuring Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Association of Bay Area Governments' Priority Conservation Area Program **to advance natural and nature-based strategies for climate resilience.**

# Plan Bay Area 2050 and PCAs



## Guiding Principle: Healthy

A **Healthy** Bay Area where the region's natural resources, open space, clean water and clean air are conserved and the region actively reduces its environmental footprint and protects residents from environmental impacts.



## Plan Element: Environment

Plan Bay Area 2050 for the first time included an **Environment Element**, which addressed key themes such as **reducing risks from hazards** and **expanding access to parks and open space**.



## Key Strategies



**STRATEGY EN1**  
SEA LEVEL RISE  
ADAPTATION



**STRATEGY EN4**  
URBAN GROWTH  
BOUNDARIES



**STRATEGY EN5**  
CONSERVATION  
LANDS



**STRATEGY EN6**  
PARKS AND  
RECREATION



## Implementation Plan

**Implementation Action 10c:** Revamp the PCA planning framework using a data-driven approach to better prioritize the most critical areas for conservation, while addressing a broader range of policy concerns



# PCA Refresh Scope

In March 2022, MTC executed a **\$250,000 grant** agreement with the California Department of Conservation from the state's Sustainable Agricultural Lands (SALC) Program to engage partners and stakeholders in:

- **Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the current PCA planning framework;**
- **Articulating a vision for next-generation PCAs;**
- **Establishing clear goals and objectives for PCAs;**
- **Developing and/or refining data and mapping tools, as well as other guidelines and resources, for program partners.**



# Summary of Stakeholder Engagement To-Date



## Technical Advisory Committee Meetings

A 16-member Technical Advisory Committee has met three (3) times, comprising experts that represent different sectors and portions of the nine-county Bay Area.



## Virtual Workshop

Invitations were sent to a wide list of people and organizations interested in PCAs; 66 individuals participated in the workshop, with representation from all nine counties.



## Digital Survey

A survey was distributed to the same list as workshop participants and further promoted through several email blasts; the survey received 181 responses.



## Office Hours

Office hours provided an opportunity for more in-depth one-on-one or small group discussions. A total of eight (8) office hours meetings were held.



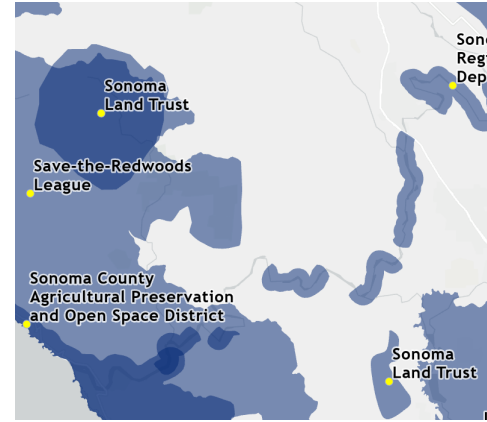
# Strengths

- Provides a tool/venue for **consensus building** across local stakeholders
- Provides **funding support**
- Provides government support and **collaboration**
- Contributes to conservation and park access planning
- Provides a tool for MTC/ABAG to evaluate nominations

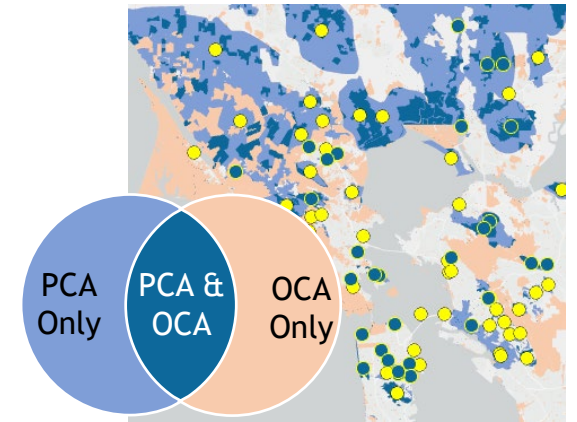


# Weaknesses

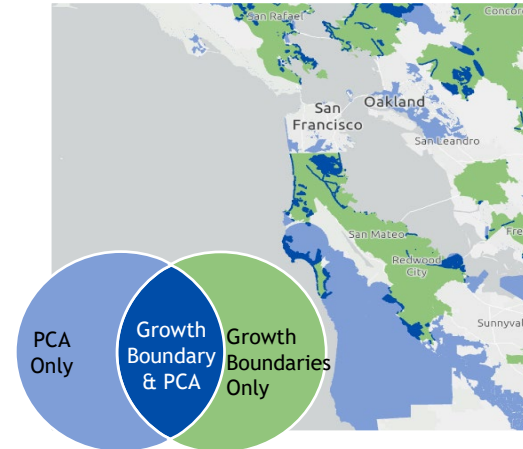
- Lack of clear boundary definition guidelines, resulting in many mutually overlapping PCAs
- Lack of clarity on how to address the significant overlap between PCAs and Officially Conserved Areas (OCAs)
- More details on the relationship of PCAs to the Regional Growth Framework outlined in Plan Bay Area 2050, including PDAs as well as urban growth boundaries
- Need for better integration with Climate Resilience and Equity



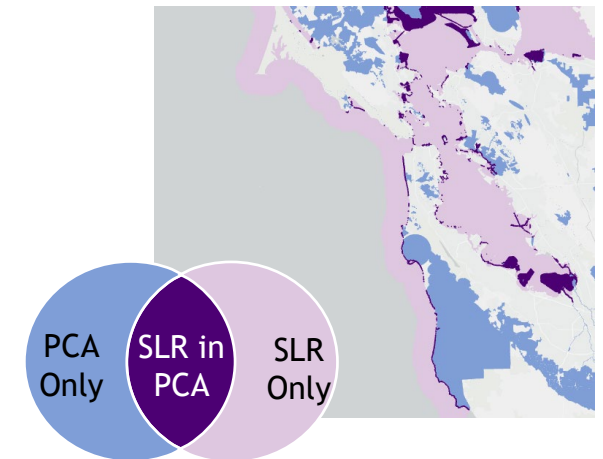
Overlapping Boundaries



Relationship with OCAs



Relationship with Growth Boundaries



Climate Change and Equity

# Opportunities

- Clear alignment to regional and state goals related to climate resilience, equity, carbon, biodiversity, and housing
- Supporting multi-beneficial projects that fall across categories
- Strengthening support for urban greening, working lands and wildlife corridors
- Identifying funding for projects unrelated to transportation purposes
- Measuring equity across project funding



# Draft Vision, Mission, and Goals for PCAs 2.0

## Vision

By the year 2050, the Priority Conservation Area Program will ensure the region's biodiversity, natural resources, open spaces, agricultural lands, clean water and clean air are resilient to a changing climate and enjoyed by all

## Mission

The PCA Program assists Bay Area governments and residents to **support conservation planning, funding, and action** for a healthy, resilient, and equitable Bay Area

## Goals

- Implement a regional land use pattern which supports the **objectives of Plan Bay Area 2050** as well as **applicable state and regional strategies** for conservation and climate change adaptation
- Provide a platform for local governments in partnership with individuals, community groups, organizations, and Tribes to plan, **share best practices and develop shared conservation strategies** that are equitable and inclusive
- **Disseminate scientific information and data** regarding regional conservation priorities
- Provide **specific tools and funding** for local governments and stakeholders to achieve priority conservation goals



# PCA Categories and Draft Objectives

<u>Refined or Proposed PCA Types</u>	<u>Draft Objectives</u>
Natural Lands	Protect the most essential lands and wildlife corridors needed to sustain regional biodiversity and critical ecosystems.
Agricultural / Working Lands	Protect lands that have high ecosystem service values in terms of providing and/or having significant potential to provide carbon sequestration service, and healthy soil, water, and food in the region.
Regional Recreation	Protect and expand trails, parks, and open spaces that ensure regional and local public health and wellbeing; promote equitable access to those recreational areas.
Urban Greening	Provide more access to green spaces within the urban context and support urban resilience in terms of increasing tree cover, surface permeability, expanding green infrastructure, and mitigating extreme heat.
★ Climate Adaptation ( <u>NEW</u> )	Prioritize lands within high climate hazards risk zones in terms of SLR, wildfire, and extreme heat for adaptation and mitigation measures.



# Key Considerations and Recommendations



## Refining the Data-Driven Framework

- Ensure the right data sources have been identified for PCA categories and that accompanying objectives are appropriate



## Nominating, Evaluating and Designating PCAs 2.0

- Preserve the local PCA nomination process to ensure local knowledge and priorities are reflected
- Supplement local planning with guidelines, resources and tools to support improved mapping and identification of PCAs, including via MTC/ABAG's Open Data portal
- Develop a regionally-defined PCA data layer, reflecting the Bay Area's highest conservation priorities as identified via the Refresh



## Funding PCA Projects

- “Expand the pie” and explore non-OBAG funding resources and partnerships to support a greater diversity of PCA project types – building off the successful State Coastal Conservancy model

# Next Steps and Pivoting to Implementation

- Next Steps for PCA Refresh

- Round 2 of partner/stakeholder outreach, including a second workshop and survey (*Summer 2023*)
- Memo 3: The Path Ahead to focus on final framework revisions and funding considerations (*Fall 2023*)
- Final data/mapping products (*Fall 2023*)
- Final report of major findings and recommendations (*Winter 2024*)

- Future Action Items for PCA Refresh Implementation

- ABAG to consider and adopt revised planning framework (*Winter 2024*)
- ABAG to conduct new round of PCA nominations (*Winter / Spring 2024*)
- MTC / SFEP to update OBAG-3 PCA grant guidelines (*TBD*)
- MTC / SFEP to conduct new call for projects (*TBD*)



# Thank You



San Francisco  
**ESTUARY**  
PARTNERSHIP

## Have Questions?

Ben Botkin | PCA Grant Program Manager

o 415.778.5299

Ben.botkin@sfestuary.org

[sfestuary.org](http://sfestuary.org)



San Francisco  
**ESTUARY PARTNERSHIP**